The Development of Japanese Educational Policy, 1945–85

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The appointment of an Ad Hoc Reform Council, or Rinkyoshin, on 21 August 1984 was a logical culmination to a lengthy period of concern in Japan over a set of widely perceived educational problems and the future prospects for Japanese education. The charge given to the council by Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone was clear: “to consider basic strategies for necessary reforms... so as to secure such education as will be compatible with the social changes and cultural developments of our country.” The prime minister went on to remind council members that “if our nation is to build up a society that is full of vitality and creativity as well as relevant to the 21st century, it is a matter of great urgency to design necessary reforms.”

As the deadline for the Ad Hoc Council’s final policy recommendations draws closer, several things are clear. Whatever the council ultimately recommends, it will be the subject of intense interest and comment both within Japan and abroad. In addition, the problems that the recommendations are designed to alleviate are not recent ones but have their roots in earlier phases of Japan’s postwar educational development. Finally, this systematic attempt to institute fundamental educational reforms is not a new phenomenon in Japan. Indeed, major attempts to implement basic educational reforms occurred in the 1870s and again following World War II. In the first instance the reform movement was initiated by the new Meiji government, in reaction to a perceived external threat, as a means of building a modern state as quickly as possible, while in the latter case the reforms were imposed by a powerful occu-
pation force intending to transform Japan from a military dictatorship into a democratic society. In both cases the initial sweeping reforms were followed by a more conservative reaction that tempered the earlier changes.

**Japanese Education, 1868–1945**

The first of these reforms occurred in the early Meiji period (1868–80) when Western education was introduced for the purpose of modernizing the nation. The Japanese approach was a pragmatic one, based on the Imperial Charter Oath of 6 April 1868 which called on the people to eschew old-fashioned ways, insisting that “knowledge shall be sought throughout the world.” The major criterion used by the Meiji reformers was simply to borrow the best features of several Western educational systems and adapt them to the Japanese situation. As a result, a highly centralized administrative structure with an emphasis on state-run normal schools was borrowed from France; a system of higher education rooted in a handful of elite public universities was the German contribution; the English model of Spartan-like, character-building preparatory schools stressing moral discipline fit nicely into the Japanese context; and from the United States came the model for elementary education, a number of practical pedagogical approaches, and an interest in vocational education.

Another important element in Japan’s rush to reform was the policy of sending promising young students abroad for study while at the same time hiring foreign experts, the so-called oyatoi gaikokujin (foreign employees) as teachers and advisors until enough young Japanese could be trained to replace them. The best estimates of the numbers of these foreign employees in Japan between 1868 and 1912, range from 3,000 to 6,000. Whatever the number, these foreign educators were instrumental in introducing Western educational thought, practice, textbooks, and equipment into the country.2

From 1868 to about 1875, the Meiji reformers pursued modernization in a pell-mell fashion. By the latter date, however, they began to believe that events were moving too rapidly, that certain Western ideas (e.g., individualism) were not well suited to the Japanese environment, and they systematically began to slow down the process. By 1880 a widespread attitude had emerged that the reforms of the previous decade

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had gone too far, and steps needed to be taken to recapture the essence of such traditional values as Confucianism which, in the view of one leading scholar, "taught that the meaning of social life lay . . . in cultivating relationships among members of society built on trust, a fundamental sense of one's humaneness, and above all, a commitment to loyal action on behalf of others." This, its advocates insisted, "should be reintegrated as a nutritive value into modern Japanese life."³

The success of the Meiji educational strategy is affirmed by the noted historian and former U.S. ambassador to Japan, Edwin O. Reischauer, who concludes that this policy was "closely tailored to national needs as the leaders saw them. It eventually created a literate mass of soldiers, housewives, and workers with ample middle-level technical skills—an aspect of education that many of today's modernizing countries have failed adequately to appreciate—and a thin stream of highly talented young men emerging from the universities to occupy positions of leadership in government and society."⁴

Before and during World War II, American policymakers saw Japanese education as a conscious vehicle for carrying out the intent of the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education. This document promulgated by the Emperor Meiji on 30 October 1890, remained the official statement of the principles underlying Japanese education until it was scrapped by the occupation authorities. The rescript gave both legal form and, perhaps more significantly, moral force to an educational system that supported the rise of militarism and ultranationalism during the late 1920s and 1930s.

The Imperial Rescript is a key document from several points of view. It paraphrases the acceptable and highly moralistic Confucian virtues to which all loyal Japanese were expected to adhere and sets down the principles from which much of the militaristic and ultranationalistic emphasis in education developed. Along the latter lines it clearly subordinates the individual to the good of the state and promotes unthinking acceptance of, and blind obedience to, instructions from above. An Office of Strategic Services (OSS) document on Japanese education, prepared during World War II, concludes that "the attitude that education should be for the purposes of the State rather than for the liberation of the individual has permeated the entire system. Elementary school instruction has been dedicated to the development of unquestioning loyalty. The Department of Education's exclusive copyright over textbooks held since

1903, has made it possible to intensify this process of indoctrination." The minister of education, in a 1941 speech, called for the eradication of thoughts based on individualism and liberalism, and the firm establishment of a national moral standard with emphasis on service to the state."

The Occupation of Japan, 1945–52

A second major set of reforms took place immediately following World War II as a key element in the Allies' determination to transform Japan from an aggressive military dictatorship into a peace-loving democracy. When Japan surrendered to the Allies in August 1945, those Americans charged with planning the eventual occupation of Japan shared an essentially common view of prewar and wartime Japanese education and the role it had played in Japan's military expansion into much of Asia and Oceania. Since the Meiji Restoration of 1868, they believed that education was consciously used by Japan's political leaders as an instrument to advance the ends of the state, including economic development, national integration, and military power and conquest.

When the emperor's representatives formally signed the instrument of surrender, Japan lay numbed and prostrate before a conquering army. The country's educational system was in shambles; capitulation found 18,000,000 students idle, 4,000 schools destroyed, and only 20 percent of the necessary textbooks available. In addition, large portions of many of those textbooks contained unacceptable nationalist propaganda which had to be removed before they were suitable for pedagogical purposes. Finally, more than one of every three institutions of higher education lay in ruins, thousands of teachers were homeless, hungry, and dispirited, and many of their pupils had been moved to safer areas. In short, a functioning educational system was virtually nonexistent.

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8 Robert King Hall, Education for a New Japan (New Haven, Conn., 1949), 2.
The major goals of the Occupation of Japan can be simply stated as the democratization, demilitarization, and decentralization of Japanese society. The Americans recognized that a new orientation of the educational system was an indispensible element in achieving these objects, especially that of remaking Japan into a functioning democracy.

Having surrendered its sovereignty to the Allies, Japan entered a period in which the policy-making function was no longer in its control. As an occupied nation, all Japan could hope for was that through persuasion and political skill it could at least have an influence on the educational policy that the Americans formulated and had the power to force a defeated people to implement. It was during this time that the process of transforming Japan’s prewar system proceeded apace. This was a dual process in which the terrible scars of war led the Japanese people to acquire a strong aversion to their military establishment while, simultaneously, the Occupation authorities systematically dismantled the prewar institutions and structures which they saw as causing Japan’s slide into the abyss of militarism and nationalism. The Japanese commitment to peace was evidenced by the widely accepted Article 9 of the 1946 Constitution which forever renounced war as an instrument of the national policy; the emergence of the so-called “nuclear allergy” which has made discussions of national defense and American nuclear forces in Japan a politically explosive subject; and the increasingly left-of-center political ideology of intellectuals, university students, and the Japan Teachers’ Union.10

This new situation, reinforced by surviving remnants of the prewar Japanese willingness to accept and obey instructions from above, enabled the American authorities to use the existing instruments of government to implement educational reforms. The Occupation proceeded to censor textbooks, magazines, and films as well as to purge teachers whose pre-Occupation activities were deemed to be either undemocratic or actively supporting the military’s policies.11 Thus, one of the great ironies of this period was that in encouraging the democratization of Japanese education, the actions of the all-powerful Occupation forces were often not democratic.

What appeared to be wrong with Japanese education, in the eyes of most American policymakers, was that it was not like the American


American-initiated educational reforms were, therefore, designed to reform Japanese education along the lines of the American model. This meant that the Occupation authorities would have to transform the prewar orientation of the Japanese people (characterized by an emphasis on filial piety, the perfection of moral powers, group cohesion and harmony, and loyalty and obedience to the emperor and the nation) into one that would be congruent with the goals of the United States in Japan.

To assist in carrying out this transformation, the First United States Education Mission, composed of twenty-seven prominent American educators, was invited to spend a month in Japan examining the educational system for the purpose of making recommendations for the reform of that system. True to their American heritage, they rejected most of the elements of prewar Japanese education and insisted on the democratization of Japan's highly centralized enterprise into a system in which the centralized power of the powerful Ministry of Education would be broken and local communities would control their own educational destinies. The American reformers also suggested the dismantling of the highly differentiated multitrack system of prewar days in favor of a nine-year compulsory single-track as part of an American-style 6-3-3-4 school ladder, along with steps designed to foster greater individuality, freedom of inquiry, development of the "whole child," coeducation, greater flexibility in the curriculum, and a radical reform of Japan's written language.\(^\text{12}\)

As a number of scholars, Japanese and American, have pointed out, many of these reforms, such as coeducation, comprehensive schools, and local control, were deeply rooted in the American democratic model but were dysfunctional when transported to the Japanese context. The Japanese educational authorities, however, had little choice but officially to accept the recommendations of the mission's report, and, indeed, these recommendations became the basis for a series of important educational laws implemented between 1947 and 1949. The most important of these were the Fundamental Law of Education and the School Education Law which were promulgated in 1947.\(^\text{13}\) The former represented a 180-degree change from the 1890 Imperial Rescript, declaring that "education shall aim at the full development of personality, striving for the rearing of the

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12 Edward R. Beauchamp, "Educational and Social Reform in Japan: The First U.S. Education Mission," in The Occupation of Japan, ed. Burkman, 175–92. It should be pointed out that a Japanese scholar, Hideo Satow, has found evidence in the National Archives to suggest that the 6-3-3 system was not imposed on the Japanese, but was instituted at the request of a committee of Japanese educators. See "6-3-3 System Not Imposed by GHQ," Japan Times, 15 Sept. 1986, 2.

13 Herbert Passin, Society and Education in Japan (New York, 1965), 293–304.
people sound in mind and body, who shall love truth and justice, esteem individual value, respect labor and have a deep sense of responsibility, and be imbued with the independent spirit, as builders of a peaceful state and society.” It also established the important principle that all major educational regulations would be made by parliamentary procedure. The latter, on the other hand, established a new educational structure in which a 6-3-3 school ladder was created, the school-leaving age was raised to fifteen, and coeducation was legitimated. These two basic pieces of education legislation still form the legal underpinnings of Japanese education.

By 1949 major accomplishments of the Occupation were completed. The political and strategic imperatives of the emerging “Cold War” caused American policymakers to reassess their plans for the future of Japan and to ally themselves more closely with conservative Japanese interests.\(^\text{14}\) The reforming zeal of the Americans had abated, and the environment in Japan underwent an important change. Before American control was withdrawn in the spring of 1952, the American reformers had succeeded in clearing away the old undemocratic structures, replacing them with ones more to their liking; they had replaced those individuals identified as hostile to democracy with Japanese who seemed committed to democratic values; and they had provided the Japanese educators with new curricula, textbooks, and methodologies.

The Post-Occupation Period, 1952–60

April 28, 1952, the day on which the San Francisco Peace Treaty took effect, marked the official end of the American Occupation of Japan. For the first time since its surrender, sovereignty was returned to the Japanese government. In the six years and eight months separating these two watershed events the social and political systems of the Japanese nation had been dramatically transformed into an essentially democratic pattern, albeit not one which was a mirror image of the American model of democracy. Most Japanese preferred the new postwar environment to that which had brought them such destruction, but there were many who felt that the Occupation reforms had gone too far and, indeed, had often done considerable violence to cherished Japanese values and traditions.

Given the new political and social systems existing in 1952, it should not be surprising that the Japanese government undertook a careful reassessment of the recent reforms with an eye to correcting what were widely viewed as excesses. Education did not escape the government’s reassess-

ment, and during the post-1952 period the Japanese authorities scrapped a number of the American-initiated reforms and modified others to fit traditional Japanese models more closely. For example, the 1948 Board of Education Law, designed to implement the Occupation policy of transferring power from the centralized Ministry of Education to local communities through locally elected boards of education was abolished, and since 1956 board members have been appointed by the prefectural governors or local mayors with the approval of the appropriate legislative body, thereby making the school board an integrated part of local administration.

The Occupation-imposed abolition of shushin (moral education), seen by the Americans as a primary vehicle for inculcating prewar ideas of racial supremacy, the righteousness of Japanese overseas expansion, and the divinity of the emperor, was viewed by many Japanese as having thrown out the baby with the bathwater, leaving public education without a spiritual backbone. In fact, in 1949, even before the Occupation ended, Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida advocated the creation of an educational statement on morality that would replace the discredited Imperial Rescript. The Japanese left immediately denounced Yoshida’s proposal as an attempt to reinstitute prewar thought control. The following year Teiyu Amano, then minister of education, provoked charges of a rebirth of militarism by proposing to celebrate national holidays by raising the rising sun flag and playing the national anthem. He also echoed Yoshida’s call for a new ethical code to replace the discredited Imperial Rescript. By 1958, the Ministry of Education’s required “course of study” included one hour per week for moral education, called dotoku in place of the disreputable term, shushin. This reintroduction of moral education has not led to the evils predicted by critics. A leading American specialist on Japanese education, William K. Cummings, after observing several lessons in the mid-1970s, concluded that “I quickly overcame my bias against moral education and looked forward to each week’s new drama.” Rather than finding right-wing patriotic themes in these lessons, Cummings was surprised to see that the lessons “emphasized fundamental matters such as the value of life, the foolishness of fighting, the importance of friendship, the problems of old people.”

The conservative Ministry of Education also began to challenge another legacy of the Occupation, the powerful Japan Teachers’ Union. Organized in the early days of the Occupation, primarily by a minority of militant communists and socialists (the only groups having “clean

hands" following the war), the Japan Teachers’ Union was quickly recognized by MacArthur's headquarters. As the result of the union's close ties with the political opposition, and the beginnings of the cold war in the early 1950s, the conservative Ministry of Education refused to have anything to do with the JTU, claiming that it was devoted to fomenting a communist revolution and its members were, therefore, unfit to teach Japan’s youth. Relations between these two major educational forces have not improved significantly in recent years, and prospects for real understanding and cooperation are not yet on the horizon.¹⁶

This Japanese “counter-reformation” received strong support from the business community. Indeed, as early as 1952, Nikkeiren, an influential federation of some of Japan’s largest industrial firms, issued a statement on education policy that bluntly expressed the unhappiness in industrial circles with the democratically oriented schools and called for an educational system that was more closely allied to the needs of industry. In practice this meant more and better vocational courses and a higher degree of professionalization at the university level. This salvo would not be the last fired by the big guns of Nikkeiren.

Certainly big business favored much of the “reverse course,” but the more important meaning of that phenomenon was that it clearly demonstrated a broadly based Japanese conviction that, if they were to have democracy (and there was widespread agreement that they would), they were determined to have a variant of it that was more-or-less consistent with their traditions and culture. As one distinguished Japanese scholar explained, “it was easy for liberty to become license,” and the “incompatibility of American-style democracy with Japanese traditions was [clear], and the process of developing an amended Japanese version of democratic ideals was pushed forward.”¹⁷ The Japanese preference for centralization reasserted itself, but centralization was not necessarily undemocratic. One can make the argument, and many Japanese do, that their centralized system ensures that every child—from Okinawa to Hokkaido—enjoys “equality of opportunity” because of substantially equal physical facilities throughout the archipelago, a uniform curriculum administered by a single Ministry of Education, equal access to the same textbooks, teachers of relatively equal competence, and a uniform set of national standards.


As governmental authorities turned to "fine tuning" the new system to reflect more faithfully the Japanese cultural environment and the spirit of the nation's new democratic ideology, they also began to expand the net of educational opportunity more widely than ever before in Japanese history and to improve the quality of the education offered to students. Reinforcing these essentially political decisions was the reality of a post-war "baby boom" which began in 1947, after large numbers of military and civilian personnel returned from the wartime assignments overseas. The birthrate rose sharply after 1945. For example, the number of births soared from 1,576,000 in 1945 to 2,718,000 in 1947. This resulted in a virtual flood of children reaching elementary school age in 1953, along with the certain knowledge that the same children would enter junior high school in 1959, senior high school in 1962, and the university in 1965.

This trend required the government to expand rapidly educational facilities systematically beginning with the elementary grades, and continuing through the university level as the youngsters wended their way through the system. Providing the necessary facilities would have been difficult enough in normal times, but Japan still suffered from the loss of educational facilities in World War II. The problem was exacerbated by an expansion in educational opportunity and by a significant rise in the percentage of students continuing beyond the elementary and secondary levels. "The new 6-3-3-4 system established in the late 1940's gave people much easier access to higher levels of education than the old system, and an economic revival in the late 1950's followed by a period of high economic growth in the 1960's and the first half of the 1970's, made educational opportunity which had been institutionally offered feasible."18

There is no doubt that postwar Japan has made enormous strides in providing expanded educational opportunities for its young people. In the thirty-five years between the end of World War II and 1980, the number of students attending school in Japan increased over 80 percent, from 15 million to over 27 million. Virtually all youngsters complete the nine years of compulsory education (99.98 percent), and an impressive 94.2 percent of these graduates go on to a noncompulsory senior secondary school. Perhaps most significantly, the Japanese have persuasively demonstrated that mass education does not have to be purchased with diluted standards. International achievement tests have consistently placed the Japanese at, or close to, the top in a variety of subjects. Furthermore,

in 1980, 37.4 percent of the senior high school graduates attended some kind of institution of higher education.19

Prior to 1945, Japanese females had very limited access to advanced education, especially that of an academic type. The secondary education alternatives that were available to them heavily favored domestic education, while university preparatory schools were a male preserve. It has only been recently that educational opportunities for women have improved in Japan. In 1970, for example, “the proportion of Japanese women with an education beyond high school constituted a fraction of the United States distribution, particularly among women between the ages of 35 and 44.”20 Today, although things have changed for the better, much remains to be done. In 1983, 94.5 percent of the female college-age cohort attended the noncompulsory senior high school as opposed to 93.1 percent of the male cohort. In addition, one out of every three female graduates advances to some form of higher education, but the vast majority of these female graduates enroll in junior colleges, and most of those who attend four-year schools major in English literature, home economics, and other subjects that prepare better for homemaking than for business or professional pursuits.

The slow progress of women is rooted in part in deeply held attitudes about their proper role in both education and society. A 1973 government survey “found only 14 percent of mothers wanting their daughters to have a university education, in contrast to 49 percent for sons.”21 Still another example of the lingering bias against the education of women is reflected in a 1983 decision by the administration of the Kyoto Pharmaceutical College that it would give preference to male applicants. It seems that the number of young men successfully passing the entrance examination had been declining for several years and more women than usual were accepted. The university officials felt threatened by what they called the “feminization” of their institution, and sought to reverse this trend. They justified their decision on the grounds that Japanese companies overwhelmingly prefer to hire men and that the university sees no point in producing female graduates who will not be hired by the industry. It is clear that, although Japanese women have made important educational strides since 1945, they have a long way to go to achieve equality with their brothers.

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21 Ibid., 151.
As the government has grappled with the problem of creating expanded educational opportunities, it also has worked hard to provide the resources and teachers needed to improve the quality of education. The Ministry of Education has issued four five-year plans, beginning in 1958, designed to address problems of class size, staffing needs, and other technical issues. Since 1980, an ambitious twelve-year (1980–92) plan has been in operation. Perhaps one of the most effective activities of the Ministry of Education is the preparation of official revised courses of study, which serve as guides for the various curricula. The first of these was undertaken in the late 1950s in an attempt to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of postwar education. A second revision occurred in 1968 and focused on providing a higher level of study in mathematics, science, and other subjects. These decennial revisions ensure that the curriculum is kept up-to-date and, indeed, provide at least a partial explanation for the success of Japanese students in the International Survey of Educational Achievement (IEA) Project, the first large-scale, systematic attempt to measure achievement in mathematics, science, social studies, etc., across national boundaries.

Expansion in the 1960s and 1970s

No less important for Japanese education than the Occupation reforms of the immediate postwar years was the unprecedented period of high economic growth triggered by the restoration of sovereignty and accelerated by the outbreak of the Korean War, continuing unabated until the first oil crisis of 1973. Enjoying a steady accretion of her growth rate of over 10 percent yearly (in real terms), Japan experienced rapid changes not only in her economy but also in the political and social arena. It was not so much that the democratizing themes of the Occupation were forgotten—the more democratic segment of the population would not allow that to happen—but after years of economic hardship there was a wide consensus on the need for economic reconstruction. Educational policy during the 1960s and much of the 1970s was consciously designed to foster economic development. Indeed, there is little doubt that since the middle of the 1950s the interests of industry have been extremely influential in shaping educational policy.

Almost immediately after Japan’s reassertion of her sovereignty in 1952, the recognition of a serious shortage of scientific and technical manpower emerged as a major educational problem. Major special interest groups, such as Nikkeiren (Japan Federation of Employers), had aggressively begun to urge the government to play a major role in overcoming the problem. Industry spokesmen generally agreed on the need for the “functional differentiation of the higher educational structure,
and ... increased specialization in courses and the graduation of more science and engineering specialists."22

There had existed in prewar Japan a system of single faculty technical schools providing subprofessional training (roughly comparable to that offered by American community colleges, but of a generally higher quality) to those either unable to pass the university entrance examination or without the necessary economic means to attend a university. Students could enter technical schools directly from the lower middle school and graduate with certification in a wide variety of technical fields, including drafting, accounting, architecture, engineering, and, in some cases, even medicine or dentistry. Although such graduates did not enjoy the same level of professional status as university graduates, "they provided the important battalions that filled the growing needs of Japanese industry."23

Many major firms were nostalgic for the prewar multitrack system which had enabled them to make "use of a status system based on the academic background of their employees. Within companies one found multiple tiers and compartments divided along school-affiliation lines. The school one had been graduated from would determine one’s type of job within the organization and the highest position one could hope to reach." In addition, there were complaints from industry about the quality of graduates entering the work force. Viewed from this perspective, the postwar reforms had been a disruptive force within corporate culture. As the new system's considerable strengths began to be appreciated, however, members of the corporate world "began to use the system to their advantage." They began, for example, "using the rankings into which the new schools were eventually classified," and "a hierarchy among universities took shape in line with the caliber of each university's student body, and companies shifted their internal organization to match the structure of the university hierarchy."24 This reality was not lost on high school graduates who, quite naturally, saw their futures best served by attending a university in the upper reaches of the new hierarchy. This, in turn, reinforced and expanded the importance of university entrance examinations.25

23 Passin, Society and Education in Japan, 97.
In an extraordinary policy statement, issued shortly after assuming office as prime minister in 1960, Hayato Ikeda announced his intention of doubling Japan’s national income in a ten-year period. This, in effect, required an annual growth rate of about 7 percent. In the late 1950s Japan’s share of the world gross national product stood at about 3 percent, but by the time of the first oil crisis of 1973 it had grown to a remarkable 10 percent. Japan had, in fact, achieved an average annual growth rate of about 11 percent between 1961 and 1969, attaining Ikeda’s ambitious target in just five years. By 1969 Japan’s gross national product was 3.7 times that of 1960.

Increases in per capita income kept pace with this dizzying trend and soon Japan’s standard of living reached new levels of prosperity. Per capita income, which had stood at barely $200 in the early 1950s, rocketed to $2,300 per year in 1972. Several important consequences flowed from Japan’s newfound economic cornucopia, including increased social mobility, a quickened flow of young people from rural to urban centers, a declining birthrate, and an unprecedented expansion of employment opportunities. An increasing demand for formal education reflected these economic and social developments, and educational officials were hard pressed to keep up with it.

In 1957, the recently established Economic Planning Agency, the coordinating body for overall governmental economic planning, had issued a long-range plan establishing guidelines for economic development and education’s role in achieving it. The Ministry of Education contributed a five-year plan designed to accommodate 8,000 new university places annually for science and technology students and by 1960 was close to achieving its target. Prime Minister Ikeda’s scheme to double the national income in a decade, however, required the production of an additional 170,000 scientists and engineers. The Ministry of Education planned to meet this need with a seven-year plan that added 16,000 places annually, but it was subsequently replaced with a four-year plan adding 20,000 new places yearly.

Perhaps, the single most influential educational document of this period was the so-called “Report on the Long-Range Educational Plan Oriented toward the Doubling of Income.” Prepared by a technical subcommittee of the Economic Planning Agency’s Economic Council in 1960, this document stressed the importance of education as an investment in developing human resources. It argued for more and better science and technical education to meet industry’s need for skilled workers and intoned that “future progress in economics and social welfare depends

largely on the effective use of the human resources of the nation.”27 It insisted, in the view of one close observer, on the necessity of “extending upper secondary education to most adolescents, shaping the motivational and cognitive orientations of adolescents toward a complex society through upper secondary education, and training talented human resources to compete economically in the international domain.”28

In 1962 the government passed legislation creating a system of nineteen technical colleges, designed “to train [middle-level] technicians with well-rounded general knowledge and a thoroughly specialized knowledge in technology.”29 These institutions, offering a five-year curriculum in a variety of industrial (and sometimes merchant marine) studies, are open to graduates of the lower secondary school. As of May 1983 there were sixty-two technical colleges with a total enrollment of 47,245 students, of whom 97.2 percent were male.30

This law, along with subsequent actions of the Ministry of Education, resulted in a highly differentiated system of technical education. The universities, at the apex of this system, provided both undergraduate and graduate education for scientists and high-level technical personnel. The elite nature of this arrangement can be seen in the decision to concentrate advanced courses in a handful of important universities. The technical schools described above were designed to train the large numbers of middle-level technicians needed to operate a sophisticated scientific and technical economy. In addition, specialized technical high schools, and high quality technical courses in general high schools, produced large numbers of lower-level technicians. Finally, there was created a variety of miscellaneous schools outside the formal system of education providing technical education. Many of these provide short-term courses in a wide variety of fields, including electronics. A sophisticated set of public and private industrial training centers to train skilled workers was also developed. The School of Education Law of 1961 allowed, under certain circumstances, for work done in them to be credited toward high school graduation. This differentiation, clearly, served the interests of those industrial interests who, as early as 1952, severely criticized the new educational system.

In the decade between 1960 and 1970 the government had succeeded in more than doubling the number of university science and engineering faculties and increasing the number of science and engineering graduates

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28 Shimahara, Adaptation and Education in Japan, 133.
29 Anderson, Education in Japan, 201.
by more than 2.5 times. This, however, tells only part of the story. "In 1960, 18.2 percent of the total [university] student enrollment was in the fields of science and engineering; by 1975 this figure was up to 23.2 percent. Even more significant, within the national universities, where the government efforts were most direct, the figure rose from 24 percent to 33 percent in these fields." 31

Early on, educational planners had identified secondary education as a critical factor in human resource development, and, although recognizing the long-term need for overall improvement in general secondary education, they opted to give priority to science and technical education in the short term. The same study that called for the training of 170,000 scientists and engineers also insisted on the need for 439,000 technical school graduates in the same period. This goal could not, of course, be met without a substantial increase in the number of technical teachers available, so a number of temporary three-year teacher-training institutes, tied to nine major national universities, were created. In the next seven years 800 future teachers were admitted to these schools. 32

As noted earlier, the postwar period was one of quantitative expansion, but the need for a similar qualitative improvement remained. The amount of public money devoted to education rose from 159,818 million yen in 1950 to 372,006 million yen in 1955; to 1,057,070 million yen in 1963; and to 5,060,245 million yen in 1973. This money went not only toward providing better teachers, but also better facilities (including laboratories and libraries), smaller classes, in-service training for teachers, 33 and a system of Science Education Centers in each prefecture where "teachers at all precollege levels received inservice training in the use of the latest materials and methods for science and mathematics teaching." 34

The widespread acceptance of higher education as a prerequisite to maintaining Japan's newly acquired affluence sent increasing numbers of high school graduates through the narrow gates of the universities. The gatekeepers, however, insisted that those admitted first demonstrate their merit by successfully passing rigorous entrance examinations. 35 Ezra Vogel has suggested that "no single event, with the possible exception of marriage, determines the course of a young man's life as much as entrance examinations, and nothing, including marriage, requires as many years of planning and hard work." 36

32 Ichikawa, "Japan," 115.
33 Japan, Ministry of Education, Educational Statistics, Japan (Tokyo, 1976), 73.
34 Anderson, Education in Japan, 98.
36 Ezra P. Vogel, Japan's New Middle Class: The Salary Man and His Family in a Tokyo Suburb (Berkeley, Calif., 1963), 40.
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A bizarre but true example of the kind of horror stories associated with entrance examinations is recounted by Ronald Dore. In describing how a preoccupation with these examinations at higher educational levels tends to create a “backwash” into the lower levels of the educational system, he describes its logical conclusion in “a pre-pre-kindergarten which was reported in 1970 to have failed to devise adequate tests for 2 year olds and decided to test their mothers instead.” Although an admittedly extreme case, there are few Japanese who would be overly surprised upon hearing about this case. Thomas Rohlen characterizes this kind of “obsession with entrance examinations” as “a dark engine powering the entire school system” and, if anything, he understates the case.

Most Japanese seem to think that there is entirely too much emphasis placed on examinations, but very little has been done to change this situation. What are the obstacles preventing a change that most thoughtful people seem to favor? At least three possible answers, in no particular order of importance, suggest themselves: (1) a deeply ingrained Confucian legacy; (2) powerful vested interests; and (3) too few places for too many applicants.

The Confucian legacy stresses the efficacy of memorizing the classics, and a number of scholars have pointed out how deeply inbred this approach seems to be in the Japanese psyche. One distinguished student of Japan has written that Japan’s “ferocious race and competition for the best possible places at the best universities, is simply the ancient Chinese system of state examinations to accede to the class of jugakusha (literati) in a modern context. Today one may gloss Karl Marx instead of Mencius, or write an essay on spherical trigonometry instead of defining filial piety, but the terms, rules and outcomes of the game have changed very little.” Whoever learns the most facts and best develops test-taking skills is most likely to be successful.

The entrance examinations of today are still shaped by this attitude, but it may not be quite as absurd as it sounds. There is a widely held view among many Japanese that the value of entrance examinations is not in the information memorized and regurgitated upon command, but rather in the intense, difficult, and often lonely experience of preparing for those examinations. This, we are told, strengthens one’s character and moral fiber and prepares the individual for the arduous challenges

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37 Ronald P. Dore, The Diploma Disease: Education, Qualification, and Development (Berkeley, Calif., 1976), 49.
39 Fosco Maraini, Japan: Patterns of Continuity (Tokyo, 1971), 27.
lying ahead. Interestingly enough, Thomas Rohlen lends support to this view when he suggests that, although intelligence is needed to pass the exams, "self discipline and willpower are equally essential."\textsuperscript{40}

A second obstacle to reforming the examination system lies in the powerful vested interests which might suffer economically if significant changes were to be made in existing arrangements. A visit to virtually any bookshop in Tokyo, or any large urban center, will illustrate the profitability of the current examination system to publishers. These bookshops are usually crowded with students of all ages who flock to the shelves appropriate to their needs. Shelves are conspicuously marked with signs such as "For Secondary School Entrance Preparation."

In addition, most students preparing for entrance examinations attend voluntary and often expensive, supplementary or cram schools. Many of these are part of major nationwide chains and have made many an entrepreneur affluent. There are also the fat fees charged students for the privilege of taking a university's entrance examination; fees that can make a considerable difference to the financial health of many private institutions. These are not the only ones to benefit from the examination system which is so widely criticized. Manufacturers of specially designed student desks and worktables, desk lamps, etc., would also suffer economically from a weakening of the examination system. Ironically, even many of the victims of this system would also be victims should entrance examinations lose their centrality to the Japanese educational experience. One of the easiest and often lucrative sources of income for Japanese students who have successfully entered university is to tutor students preparing to take the examinations themselves.

A third obstacle to examination reform is a simple one. Over 90 percent of the relevant age cohort graduate from high school in Japan, and almost two-thirds of them have taken a college preparatory curriculum. "There were," in 1980, "590,000 places in higher education available and about 636,000 seniors applying." At first glance, this appears to be a reasonably close fit, but this overlooks another 200,000 applicants, called \textit{ronin}. These high school graduates from earlier years had failed in earlier attempts to enter their university of choice, and rather than admit failure, continued their studies in preparation for another try at the examination.

Expanded enrollments for a limited number of university places have inevitably meant increased competition for those relatively few places that were perceived to be of the greatest value. Thus, with more and

\textsuperscript{40} Rohlen, "Japanese Education," 29–43.
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more applicants striving to attend a handful of famous national universities, and an even smaller number of prestigious private universities, the existing hierarchy was not only maintained but also strengthened. This trend also reinforced the power of the entrance examination system, and not only for its importance as a sorting device. Every student who takes the university entrance examination, and most take the examination for more than one institution, pays a fee ranging from about US$65–100 (based on an exchange rate of 150 yen to a dollar). Thus, the money-starved private universities came to depend on the income to help meet their operating expenses.

This changed academic environment of the post-Occupation years was one in which students found the realities of university life disappointing. After working exceptionally hard for many years to pass the examination for a prestigious university, the reality of large classes, rigidly prescribed curricula, disinterested lecturers, seldom-seen professors, and a Byzantine bureaucratic structure clashed with their image of a university. The postwar educational system and its left-of-center teaching force had encouraged students to question both society’s materialism and the political assumptions underlying the conservative government’s apparent repudiation of the antiwar constitution and attempts to return Japan to a more authoritarian society.

Student radicals were an important part of the 1945–60 intellectual ferment in Japan, but during the 1960s their numbers proved to be the heart of the great student protest that shook the nation over the ratification of the revised United States–Japan Security Treaty of June 1960. The movement continued on, using the American intervention in Vietnam as an emotional focus and culminated in the great Tokyo University protest of 1968. This event marked the high point of the student movement, and student occupation of Todai’s physical facilities not only forced the university’s closure for several months but was directly responsible for suspending the 1969 entrance examinations.

The government of Prime Minister Eisaku Sato accepted the challenge and rammed through the Diet a “Bill for Emergency Measures of University Administration,” in August of the same year. The significance of this bill, which broke the back of the student movement, was that it gave university presidents and, if necessary, the minister of education extraordinary powers to supersede the authority of the faculty, and even to suspend teaching and research functions. Despite spirited opposition from those supporting traditional faculty autonomy, and although this legislation was never applied, its mere existence changed the academic environment and the traditional relationship between government and university. The result was that, with occasional exceptions, campus unrest subsided, and the student movement broke up into increasingly rival
factions, each claiming to be more ideologically pure than its opponents. They still visited violence upon one another, but their challenge to the state had been successfully met.

Somewhat like the aerodynamics of the gooney bird, the marvel of Japanese higher education is not that it fails to perform as well as critics would like, but that it works at all. Harvard sociologist Nathan Glazer's generalized characterization of Japanese education seems to be most applicable to higher education. Seemingly puzzled, Glazer has noted:

The basic paradox of Japanese education is that underfunded. . . . devoid of any marked evidence of innovation, [and] sharply criticized for its enormous emphasis on examinations, under attack from business for the quality of its college graduates, with limited research facilities, and a modest system of graduate education, torn by conflict between an alienated and radicalized teaching force in the elementary and secondary schools and a firmly conservative Ministry of Education, characterized by a college and university intelligentsia most of whom are opposed to the national government and unsympathetic to the emphasis on economic growth—it manages nevertheless to educate a labor force that serves the needs of Japanese business, industry and government. 41

The Third Major Reform Period, 1978–Present

The late 1970s and early 1980s served as a “run up” period to Japan's current educational reform movement. In the early 1970s, several important reports calling for educational reforms of various types stirred widespread discussion among thoughtful Japanese and contributed to the ferment that resulted in the appointment of the Ad Hoc Reform Council, or Rinkyoshin in 1984. The first of these early documents, published in 1970, was the Ministry of Education’s Educational Standards in Japan which provided a comparative framework within which to evaluate Japan’s educational achievements. This was soon followed by a report of one of the ministry’s advisory organs, the Central Council for Education, which caused a considerable stir and provoked the Japan Teachers’ Union to undertake its own study, which was published in 1975.

The Central Council for Education document took a swipe at both conservative apologists of the existing system and the radical Japan Teachers’ Union when it warned that “education is rapidly falling behind the times because vested interests protect the status quo, because idealists oppose reforms without paying attention to their actual contents, and because much time is spent wastefully on the discussion of reforms which

have no possibility of being implemented." The report advocated “long-range fundamental policies and measures for developing the educational system, basing these proposals on an examination of the educational system’s achievements over the past twenty years and on its understanding of the system of education appropriate for the years to come in which rapid technological innovations and national and international changes are anticipated." The then minister of education, Michita Sakata, was impressed enough by this analysis to refer to it as a plan “for the third major educational reform in Japan’s history.”

Among its proposals, all of which carried hefty price tags, were extending free public education to four and five year olds; providing teachers with large salary increases; allowing teachers more time to teach by shifting paperwork to an expanded clerical staff; expanding special education programs; and increasing subsidies to private universities. One could probably characterize this report as recognizing that educational expansion had run its course, and there was now a need to move in the direction of improving the quality of education. As was to be expected, reactions to specific proposals depended upon whether one’s ox was being gored or not.

Still another important document feeding the reform debate was the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) analysis of Japan’s educational policies. Falling back on its traditional practice of actively seeking outside advice, Japan invited the OECD to send a team of education experts to advise it on future directions. The 1971 OECD report, on balance, was probably the clearest view of Japan’s educational problems. It praised the role played by education in the nation’s industrial development, but strongly criticized the conformist nature of the Japanese system, overcentralized control, and an overemphasis on standardization in the name of egalitarianism. Instead it recommended that the time seemed to be ripe “for some practical measures aimed at the development of students’ personalities through a more flexible and less pressured scheme of education, with more free time, more curricular freedom, more diversity in extra-curricular activities and more co-operation among pupils. The time may have come,” the OECD examiners continued, “to devote more attention to such matters as co-operation, in addition to discipline and competition, and creativity, in addition to receptivity and imitation.”

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41 Ibid.
Finally, after several years of careful study, the Council on Education Reform of the Japan Teachers' Union published its own view of the correct path to educational reform. Arguing that Japanese education "is circumscribed" by the government's "high economic growth policy nationally, and Security Treaty setup with the United States internationally," the JTU report suggests that this has resulted in "environmental destruction, soaring prices, housing problems, [a] traffic mess and energy crisis."46

While the reform ferment of the early 1970s was at its height, Japan was hit by the first oil crisis in 1973. As a result of this international economic dislocation, Japan's economy sputtered to a virtual halt and, for a brief period, experienced a negative growth rate. After this sharp decrease in the growth rate, which had averaged 9.1 percent between 1959 and 1973, to a mere 4.0 percent between 1974 and 1980, the government was hard put to provide the resources needed by the education sector and, indeed, has had to find ways to reduce its financial support.

For the reverse of many of the reasons that educational enrollments expanded rapidly during the economic boom of the 1960s, the system began to contract after 1973. The birthrate has dropped sharply in recent years, and there appears to be no good reason to anticipate a turnaround in the near future. The school-age population has been decreasing since 1979 at the kindergarten level, and since 1981 at the lower elementary level, and this negative wave is gradually making its way through the entire system. Attendance rates among school-age children in the non-compulsory sector have stabilized since the 1970s, suggesting that demand may have peaked. Further, "Japan's birth rate for 1980 equaled the record low level for 1966" and, according to a government spokesman, "the proportion of women of childbearing age will decline during the next four or five years."47 Also, the percentage of Japan's under-fifteen population decreased from 22.3 percent in 1984 to 21.8 percent in 1985, which represents 105.3 boys for every 100 girls.48

Although Japan's commitment to education as an escalator for success is still very high, cracks in that commitment are beginning to appear. Professor Ikuo Amano of Tokyo University presents a persuasive argument in which he refers to a "crisis of structuration." Amano argues that postwar Japan was successful in creating a society that was both egalitarian and mobile, but since the slowdown of the economy after the oil

46 Japan Teachers' Union, How to Reform Japan's Education (Tokyo, 1975), 30.
crisis of 1973, opportunities for mobility have been significantly reduced. He believes that the Occupation’s attempt to dismantle the prewar hierarchical system of higher education failed, and that a stable hierarchy of high schools, dominated by the relatively few serving as feeder schools to the top universities, has emerged. “The opportunities to the top universities are virtually monopolized by the top high schools,” he writes, and graduates of these top schools tend to secure jobs leading to the elite positions in society. In the earlier stage of rapid expansion of secondary and higher education, Amano contends, there existed a healthy competition, but, as a result of the kinds of changes described above, the number of places in elite universities has decreased, and the number of desirable jobs available upon graduation are fewer. Although it is still true that a majority of young people continue to play this game, there are increasing numbers who are unwilling to participate.49

Amano’s assertion that most Japanese youths continue to play the competition game is undoubtedly accurate, but, for the first time, an increasing number of young people are dropping out of that game. In the past one of the things that distinguished Japanese schools from their American counterparts was their miniscule number of dropouts. In 1983, the latest year for which figures are currently available, 111,531 students of public and private senior high schools in Japan dropped out, an increase of 5.2 percent over the preceding year. These figures constituted only 2.4 percent of all senior high school students. This figure is quite low, especially when compared to the United States where 23 percent of senior high school students drop out before graduation. What is troubling, however, is that the Japanese figure has shown an increase every year since 1974 when relevant statistics were first collected.50

One of the most interesting dimensions of this phenomenon is the so-called “school refusal syndrome,” which, in the view of the Ministry of Education, is caused by “the rapidity of social change, the proliferation of the nuclear family, loss of community feelings, affluence and urbanization.” Another view, however, “blames the school system which is theoretically designed so that all children of the same group stay at the same level and work at the same pace.” When reality intrudes on this Pollyannish assumption, however, the result is “great strain on the slower children.” These children’s complaints of physical ailments that keep them home from school are neither truancy nor delinquency, but “a cry

of silence” against the terrible pressures placed upon them by an unyielding system.51

Others see the problems emerging in today’s Japan as nothing more than what they call “advanced nation disease” (senshinkoku-byo), i.e., the inevitable, if alarming, results of modern industrial society—“increases in the rates of divorce, juvenile crime, school violence and other social ills associated with countries like the United States.”52 It is undeniable that school violence, although still a minor problem when compared to that in the United States, is seen by most Japanese as simply unimaginable. The actions of this still tiny minority have shocked adult Japan because “their behavior violates the most fundamental code of Confucian-influenced traditional educational values—namely, respecting and obeying teachers.”53

There is no doubt that the socioeconomic environment of contemporary Japan is very different from that of a decade ago. Young people today are growing up in an affluence that is in stark contrast to that of previous generations. They are living in a more universal culture; the music which they listen to on their Walkman is the same as their counterparts in Düsseldorf or Detroit hear. They are sensitive to changing youth culture trends abroad, and it is not uncommon for them to have travelled overseas. They spend much of their time shopping for the latest fashions, playing video games, and even driving automobiles in increasing numbers. In summary, the consumer orientation of young people in the late 1980s is a far cry from that of the 1960s youth. Whereas politically active students a quarter of a century ago were committed to idealistic goals and were intensely interested in building what they perceived to be a better society; and a majority of those in the 1970s worked hard to become “salarymen” and share in the nation’s economic prosperity, today’s youth pursue personal pleasure with a single-minded devotion reminiscent of their older brother’s loyalty to his company.

The combination of a rigid and inflexible educational system, along with this new orientation of students, has led not only to an increase in dropouts, but also a great increase in school violence. For example, the first half of 1983 saw a 26 percent increase over violent school incidents in 1982. A bewildering increase of violence against teachers occurred and, to the suprise of many, more and more females are becoming violent;

the National Police Agency reported that in 1984 almost one out of every five youngsters taken into custody by the police was a female.54

Both 1983 and 1984, however, saw a slight decline in school violence according to NPA reports, but that violence which occurred has been characterized by authorities as more "vicious" than in the past; indeed the NPA recorded an increase "in such crimes as kidnapping, arson, and assaults by minors."55 The category showing the greatest increase, however, is that of ijime, or school "bullying" and both the vernacular and English-language press have been filled with reports, editorials, and letters to the editor describing it and analyzing its causes. It has become so serious a problem that the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department has recently created "a special unit for taking into public custody tormentors in school bullying cases." They report that in the period 1–18 November 1985 they received forty calls from victims and, "14 [of them] were taken up as criminal cases." The complaints included inflicting bodily injuries, blackmailing, being burnt with cigarette butts and a cigarette lighter, forcing victims to drink large quantities of sour milk, poking hot needles under a victim's fingernails and forcing them to eat insects, etc.56 Another recent article reports that a significantly large group of children "who are apparently victims of bullying at schools have been admitted to . . . a mental hospital for children in Tokyo." The hospital reports that "many admitted children not only refuse to go to school but also show symptoms of obsessional neurosis . . . out of fear of bullying."57

It is important to understand that, as disturbing as such uncivilized behavior may be, bullying is a tragic phenomenon that occurs at schools in all countries and, indeed, it is nothing new in Japan.58 In fact, one cannot be sure that its practice today is of greater magnitude than in the past. The argument can be made that because of changes in society, bullying and school violence are now regularly reported whereas in the past they went unreported for a variety of reasons. Donald Roden argues, for example, that in the elite prewar higher schools upperclassmen "customarily intimidated" new students, and "any sign of annoyance could lead to more severe forms of harassment." This behavior was not described as bullying, however, but merely as "initiation." More serious were the so-called "welcome storm" (kangei sutomu) in which new stu-

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55 Ibid.
56 Japan Times, 19 Nov. 1985, 3.
dents "would be attacked in their sleep by a roving band of upperclass-
men," while terrified, they "quivered in huddled masses."59

There are a number of other issues having relevance to the policy
process, but lack of space precludes a discussion of them. There is little
doubt, however, that the most important policy issues include the ex-
amination system, centralized control over the educational system, the
role of education in fostering economic development, and the knotty
problem of how to reform Japanese education to meet the challenges of
the twenty-first century while, at the same time, taking care that reforms
take a form that is harmonious with Japanese traditions and values. If
the two previous major reforms, in the early Meiji period and following
World War II, are any guide, we can expect reforms of a rather sweeping
nature to be made in the next few years, to be followed shortly by a
period of reflection in which modifications of the original reforms are
made to bring them into closer conformity with the realities of Japanese
life.

One of the major differences between the 1980s and the two earlier
reform experiences is that in both the Meiji and the Occupation periods
there were foreign models available that most Japanese agreed were wor-
thy of emulation. The foreign models, whether English, French, German,
or American, were models with which their creators were reasonably
satisfied. Today, however, there is no foreign model that stands out as
an obvious candidate for adaptation. Virtually all of the countries to
which Japan has traditionally looked for educational ideas are themselves
engaged in reform efforts to salvage inadequate educational systems. Per-
haps the question that ought to be posed is, "Can the Japanese re-
formers create a new model which will not only meet their needs in the
twenty-first century, but will also serve as a model from which the rest
of the world might learn?"

59 Donald T. Roden, Schooldays in Imperial Japan: A Study in the Culture of a Student
Elite (Berkeley, Calif., 1980).